



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: MFWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, November 8 - 29, 2008

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2007 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Wolf Monitoring Activities

On the 19th, Blackfeet Tribe Wildlife Program Biologist Carney collared an adult male wolf that had been captured in a coyote set near Heart Butte on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Carney has also had numerous reports of up to 4 wolves traveling in the area. FWP and the Tribe will work together and share information to learn more about the group.

Flights: none.

FWP encourages hunters, landowners, and other outdoor enthusiasts to report wolves through the online reporting button or to send in one of the pre-printed postcards available at all FWP offices, many US Forest Service offices, and license providers throughout the state. Information provided by the public helps FWP more accurately monitor wolf numbers and distribution in Montana.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

On the 9th near Reed Point, WS confirmed two wolves killed three sheep and injured one more that had to be euthanized the next day on a second ranch near where numerous sheep incidents have been confirmed. Wolf-killed sheep have been confirmed over the past 8 weeks on two different ranches near Reed Point. Due to the chronic behavior of the wolves preying on livestock this new pair will be removed. FWP issued the second livestock owner a SOS permit to lethally remove up to two wolves on private land. FWP also updated the SOS permit issued to the first sheep producer. On the 17th, WS confirmed one dead ewe on the first ranch and efforts to remove two wolves continued. On the 28th, WS killed one wolf. Efforts to remove a second wolf are ongoing.

On the 9th, two calves were confirmed killed on private land in the upper Big Hole. WS has been authorized to remove 1 wolf and a permit was issued to the landowner through December 31. WS will also try to get a collar out as no known packs are in this area, but trapping conditions have been poor and evening temps are borderline too cold.

On the 11th, WS confirmed that 3 cows were killed by wolves on private land southwest of Augusta in the Monitor Mountain territory. Two cows were reported as injured but could not be located for an investigation. Losses have been confirmed on this same ranch earlier in 2008. Neighboring ranches have not had depredations but are reporting wolf sightings and evidence of wolf activity. FWP has visited with them and the rancher who lost cattle. WS was authorized to kill up to three wolves and traps were placed near the carcasses. A total of three wolves were killed, one each on Nov. 12, 16, and 19. The control work is completed.

On the 19th, WS confirmed that the Hog Heaven pack killed a bull. This pack has been confirmed in 8 incidents in which a total of 5 llamas, 5 calves, and 1 bull killed between 9-15 and 11-19. FWP and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe have been coordinating monitoring and incremental lethal control during the period as some of the losses occurred within reservation boundaries. Incremental removal of 8 wolves during the period (in addition to some efforts to collar members of the pack in an effort to increase human presence and haze wolves in the area) has not stopped the depredations. WS was authorized to remove the remaining members of the pack.

Efforts near Wisdom in the Big Hole to remove 2 wolves and collar a wolf from a pack that has killed cattle are ongoing. The SOS permit is still valid. The 45-day control timeline was updated from the date of each new confirmed depredation. Lethal control efforts will end on December 15 or when two wolves are killed, whichever comes first. Efforts to collar may continue opportunistically, depending on the weather.

Outreach and Education Activities

On the 10th, Sime gave a presentation gave an overview of wolves in Montana, wolf recovery, and state-led management to an undergraduate level class at the University of Montana. On the 12th, Bradley gave a presentation to the same class specifically about wolf-livestock conflicts and nonlethal and lethal strategies to address them. About 100 students are in the class.

On the 18th, Sime participated in a panel discussion about wolves with a Montana rancher who has lost livestock to wolves and former member of the Montana Board of Livestock, the University of Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit Leader, and a representative from the National Wildlife Federation. The panel was hosted by the Rural Advocacy League as part of a week-long series on legal issues affecting rural areas and was held at the University of Montana Law School.

On the 20th and 21st, Sime met with colleagues from the Alberta Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development to share information and collaborate on topics of mutual interest for wolf management in the respective jurisdictions. Topics discussed included wolf-livestock conflict resolution, public outreach, connectivity, wolf monitoring and dispersal. The shared need to effectively address wolf-livestock conflicts and ideas / strategies to do so were also discussed during a joint meeting with southwest Alberta ranchers. Information exchange and collaboration will continue and also involve the Blackfeet Nation and Glacier National Park.

Former FWP wolf specialist Jon Trapp had a paper accepted for publication in the Canadian Field Naturalist on wolf den site selection in the Rocky Mountains. His co-authors are Paul Beier, Curt Mack, David Parsons, and Paul Paquet.

On the 13th, Lance successfully defended his Master's Thesis entitled "Application of Electrified Fladry to Decrease Risk of Livestock Depredation by Wolves." He expects to complete the final changes and graduate by the end of 2008.

Research Activities

The Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Montana, in collaboration with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Nez Perce Tribe, and Idaho Fish and Game are researching alternatives to current wolf monitoring techniques. Wolf monitoring in the northern Rockies has relied on visual observations of packs – an approach effective for a small, recovering population. However, as the population increased and distribution expanded, additional and valid techniques are needed. One approach being researched is whether wolf pack presence, abundance, and distribution can be estimated using a "patch occupancy" model that incorporates information about wolf activity in specific areas obtained from many different sources. If wolves are detected in one of a variety of ways, the "patch" is occupied. The accuracy of this approach depends on the "patch" size and how it compares to an actual wolf pack territory size. To help determine the most accurate patch size relative to wolf pack territory size, GPS collars were deployed in ID beginning in 2007. In MT, 8 GPS collars were deployed in 2008.

In Idaho, efforts have been underway for nearly 2 years (led by David Ausband) and focused on application of howl boxes to detect and count wolves on a sound recording (digital picture of sound waves of howling wolf/ves), prediction of the location and visitation to rendezvous sites to collect DNA samples, and use of hunter reports. Also, researchers (Ausband and Barbara Fannin) recently finished testing wolf hair snaring devices (rub pads) in western MT and ID to see if they would non-invasively collect hair samples from wolves. Hair samples were obtained and will be analyzed at a lab at the University of Idaho to determine if they contain wolf DNA.

In Montana, a graduate student (Lindsey Rich) will look at wolf pack territory size and factors influencing variation in territory size. Also, she will incorporate information gathered from hunters during FWP's annual telephone harvest survey into a patch occupancy model to estimate the probability that wolves are in a particular patch and to estimate wolf pack abundance and distribution. Questions were added to the telephone harvest survey beginning with the 2007 hunting season. Hunters are widespread, and their observations represent a potentially large sampling effort that can be used to estimate wolf pack abundance and distribution. Deer and elk hunters were asked about whether they saw at least one wolf during the 2007 big game hunting season. If at least one wolf was seen, the hunter was asked a few more questions. About 5% percent of the 50,039 deer or elk license holders who were successfully surveyed reported seeing at least one wolf. Questions will again be asked during the phone survey of the 2008 hunting season. All the data will be analyzed in much greater detail over the next 2 years.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

On the 6th, a male gray wolf was struck and killed by a car on Highway 278 between Bannack and Jackson in southwest Montana. There are no known collared packs in this area.

On the 8th, an ID hunter discovered a dead radio-collared wolf in the White Bird Creek pack territory. The wolf was originally marked near Ashley Lake, west of Kalispell Montana. The case is under investigation.

On the 11th, a collared female member of the Big Hole pack was hit and killed by a car on the Montana side of Lolo Pass.

On the 20th, a 65 lb gray female wolf was reported shot in self defense near Lolo Pass. The wolf was reported to have approached within 19 yards, growled and pinned its ears back. The incident is under investigation.

Other

NEW -- Delisting Update:

The USFWS public comment period on its February 2007 proposal to delist the gray wolf in the northern Rocky Mountains closed on November 28. USFWS is in the process of reviewing public comment and any other new information submitted by the public or by subject area experts. Information about the delisting proposal is available at the USFWS northern Rocky Mountains wolf website: <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

Current Management in Montana:

FWP, through an interagency cooperative agreement, is still the lead agency for all wolf conservation and management (within the bounds of federal regulations) so long as adequate federal funding continues to be made available. FWP will continue to monitor wolves, do public outreach, and guide and direct research activities. No public hunting or trapping is allowed. USDA Wildlife Services is still the agency to investigate causes of injured or dead livestock and carry out FWP's decisions to address conflicts, as guided by federal regulations. Montana will continue to stay involved in litigation and any future delisting developments and will continue to seek the most efficient, successful path to delisting. FWP will also continue its collaborative work with Montana Tribes, other state and federal agencies, and the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program.

Check the wolf pages on the FWP website for important information and updates:
<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

The bill sponsored by Montana's Senator Tester to fund a grant program for reimbursement of wolf-losses and proactive projects was included in an Omnibus Public Lands Bill that contains more than 150 public lands, water and resources bills. The U.S. Congress will not hear the Omnibus bill during its lame duck session at the end of 2008. It is expected to come up early in 2009. The program recently received a donation from the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. A total of \$72,148.34 was paid out for confirmed and probable wolf-caused losses in the first seven months (mid-May to mid-November).

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf.

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana / Columbus area at: 322-4303. Or call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.

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